

## **Bitterroot Ecosystem**

### **Area Description**

The heart of the Bitterroot Experimental Population Area is the proposed Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Recovery Area characterized by 3 federally designated Wilderness Areas covering a contiguous area of 3,902,912 acres (6,098 mi<sup>2</sup>). These include the Frank Church-River of No Return (2,361,767 acres; 3,690 mi<sup>2</sup>), the Selway-Bitterroot (1,340,681 acres; 2,095 mi<sup>2</sup>), and the Gospel Hump (200,464 acres; 313 mi<sup>2</sup>) Wilderness Areas.

### **Population Status and Distribution**

Despite numerous studies of this area, there were no verifiable sightings of grizzly bears in the last 60 years until an adult male grizzly bear was mistakenly killed by a black bear hunter in September 2007 in the northern mountains of the Bitterroot Ecosystem. In response, an intensive DNA study was conducted during the summer of 2008 by the Service to attempt to locate other grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem. Additionally, cooperative efforts between federal and state agencies provided increased efforts to educate the public and outfitters about grizzly bear identification and proper food storage and sanitation in camps. Brochures and signs were made available to all bear hunters in the area. Long-term agency and private sector sanitation efforts within the Bitterroot Ecosystem have provided bear resistant dumpsters along the travel corridors and campgrounds where black bear problems have occurred in the past. Backcountry bear resistant equipment and training have been provided to outfitters in the ecosystem.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement released in July 1997 stated grizzly recovery in this ecosystem would require the reintroduction of bears from other areas. The Service proposed such reintroduction as its preferred alternative in the draft EIS; the final EIS was released in March 2000, with the Service's final decision supposedly following in 30-90 days. In June 2001 the Service proposed to withdraw the plan to reintroduce grizzly bears into the Bitterroot system. Public comment was received and no final decision has been made.

### **For information, concerns or emergencies involving grizzly bears contact:**

Idaho Department of Fish and Game –

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U.S. Forest Service –

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Payette National Forest – Grangeville, ID; 208- 983-1950

Lolo National Forest – Missoula, MT; 406-329-3750

Bitterroot National Forest – Hamilton, MT; 406-363-7100